Full-Service Carrier (FSC) vs Low-Cost Carrier (LCC): Purchasing Decision-Making Process of Passengers

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Article Info

Abstract

The demand for the aviation industry has grown as a result of the shift in people's travel preferences brought on by rising wealth and expanding trade in the world and in our nation. Air travel is now preferred due to state assistance, new airports, superior aircraft, and the relative drop in expenses. This study's main focus is on the consumer purchase patterns of two airline companies that operate in the very competitive aviation sector. Depending on whether the airline is a full-service carrier or a low-cost carrier, these variables change. The "Factors Affecting Airline Preferences Scale" was created and distributed to passengers of two airline organizations at Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airport (a full-service carrier (FSC) and a low-cost carrier (LCC) operating in Turkey) to assess the extent to which variables like airline reputation, advertising, frequent flyer programs, price, service quality, and digital marketing tools like websites, e-mails, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and mobile applications have an impact on the process of ticket purchasing decision of passengers. It was shown that the passengers' purchasing decisions were influenced by reputation, service quality, frequent flyer programs, price, digital marketing initiatives, and advertisement. It was shown that depending on whether the airline is a full-service carrier or a low-cost carrier, the impact of these elements differs.

1. Introduction

Since the existence of humanity, the determinative role of communication in life is better understood day by day, and the effects of communication are the subject of many studies. Just like people, the way organisations express themselves towards society is as effective as the products and services they offer. In a market with intense competition, organisations have to explain themselves to society with consistent, balanced and continuous messages, provide an understanding of their identities in society and create a desirable perception in consumers' minds.

Intense competition, conscious consumers and the change in the concept of purchasing with new technologies have increased the importance of foreseeing consumer trends, knowing and understanding the consumer, making a difference in the eyes of the consumer, providing a close, versatile and dynamic communication with the consumer for the profitability, growth and sustainability of businesses.

The airline industry connecting continents and countries plays a crucial role in the development of the global economy and contributes to the growth of many sectors such as tourism, health, logistics, the fusion of cultures, and the development of countries as it provides the ability to travel faster and easier as well as being more environmentally friendly than other modes of transportation. On the other hand, intense competition in the airline industry, high costs, decreasing profit margins and unit costs have caused it to be one of the sectors most affected by the economic crises.

While airline organisations offer products such as safety, on-time departure-arrival, convenience (airport proximity or seat comfort), continuity and frequency, cabin services, ticket-baggage and ground handling services, aircraft type, services offered in line with the image of the business and the needs of the customer, it also aligns its competitive strategies with many different parameters affecting the decision and purchasing process of the passenger such as price, tariff, comfort, user-friendly website, mobile sites, call centres, frequent flyer programs and even tweets (Koçak & Atalık, 2019).

The study challenge is to identify the important variables that influence consumer behavior in the highly competitive aviation industry, particularly in the areas of airline marketing and strategic management. By identifying the influence of airline organizations' promotional, reputational, advertising, and digital marketing activities, along with elements like pricing and service quality, on consumer purchasing decisions, it aims to illuminate scholars and industry professionals. This study aims at filling the gap in terms of examining the factors effective on purchasing decision with a single scale adding advertising and digital marketing components. Measuring airlines competitive positions in Türkiye as studied by Koçak & Atalık (2017) will also contribute to literature.

2. Background

2.1. Marketing Strategies in Aviation

According to the "20-Year Passenger Forecast Report-2018" published by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), one of the most important actors in the aviation industry, the number of airway passengers will double to 8.2 billion in 2037. IATA stated that growing aviation provides excellent benefits for as the doubling of airline passengers in the next 20 years could create 100 million jobs worldwide (IATA, 2018).

Marketing strategies in the aviation sector, which profoundly may affect the world economy, have been the subject of research. In this study, the core marketing concepts such as product, price, distribution and promotion were examined within the frame of the airline industry.

Product / Service

In the airline industry, the product is defined as the air relocation of passengers, cargo and mail between two points by an aircraft, and this exchange can be made directly and via connecting flights. An airline product is a service with intangible features rather than a seat that carries passengers between two points (Gerede, 2015: 5-9).

The airline services are categorised as pre-flight, on-board, and post-flight services. Ticketing, free check-in, seat selection, baggage handling, excess baggage, travel insurance, lounge, payment facilities, and airport transportation services are some pre-flight services. On-board or cabin services can be listed as baggage placement and seating assistance, catering services, technical services and first aid support. These services include comfort, cabin crew courtesy, nutrition, health, security and entertainment. Car rental, baggage tracing, reclaim and transportation are some post-flight services (Görkem & Yağcı, 2016: 433; Faiyetole & Yusuf, 2019). Innovative services include SMS for amendments, self-check-in (express baggage), blockchain infrastructure, digital apron, travel with an ID card, queue and counter optimisation, online check-in, e-ticket, and new-generation self-service kiosks. E-service quality (Bakır & Atalık, 2021) is an important concern in all those service stages.

Price

As the price is one of the most critical factors affecting passenger preference in the airline industry, airline organisations offer different business models. Low-cost carriers (LCC) are a severe threat to traditional full-service carriers (FSC). Traditional airlines suffered heavy losses due to terrorism, war, SARS and COVID-19 after 2001, while low-cost carriers generally remained profitable (Atalık & Özel, 2007: 285).

Place

Place component of the airline industry consists of indirect distribution channels where intermediaries are involved in the sales process between the airline company and the passenger, travel agencies that receive commissions from each sale on their behalf, and ticket sales offices of other airline organisations (Atalık, 2016: 140-145).

Due to the high commissions paid to travel agencies, airline organizations began to develop various strategies to lower distribution costs in the 1990s. They also ran numerous campaigns to significantly increase direct sales online and used the Internet as a distribution tool to track capacity and frequency, collect/distribute operations, make occupancy plans, open up to new markets, and communicate with their customers about their preferences (Atalık, 2016: 140-145).

Computerised booking systems provide services such as ticketing, booking, sales, easy access to flight information, making last-minute changes, lowest price tracking, car rental and travel guidance. Search engines quite often used as data sources (Koçak, 2020) such as Google Flights, Momondo, KAYAK, Skyscanner, Expedia, and Adioso help airline organisations with distribution issues on referral fees. Digital marketing (one of the independent variables) is the place component of the marketing mix in this study.

Promotion

Personal selling, advertising, and public relations are the promotional strategies most frequently utilized in the airline sector. Personal selling has become more crucial, particularly in the last decade, as a result of increased competition and consumer technology use brought on by the expansion of low-cost airline operations in the airline sector; however, personal selling has been replaced by travel agencies and travel search engines (Eser, 2016: 181).

The advertisements of airline organisations aim to increase the corporate image and brand value and include information about new routes, discounts, frequent flyer points, new aircraft models and advertisements. Airline personnel are reflected by the image of friendly, problem-solving personnel in the advertisements and are encouraged to show these behaviours. Pegasus Airlines works with Refinery as a creative agency, also works with 4129 for social media, with Hype Agency for performance marketing, and with Vizeum Karat for purchases (interview with marketing manager, dated 2.5.2019). Turkish Airlines works with Wanda Digital for the global and local communication of its brand, with Tribal Worldwide Istanbul in the social media competition, Publicis Istanbul in the advertising agency, Native Media and Skala Medya in the media competition related to local operations, from its global media works (Mediacat, 2018).

Other promotional activities are corporate publications, in-flight magazines, sponsorship, meetings and conferences, social responsibility, lobbying, special days and sales development. Organisations have also started taking the advantage of Big Social Data potential. Sternberg et al. (2018) carried out a study investigating customer engagement of Turkish Airlines using big social media data.

3. LCC vs FSC

Table 1. Comparison of FSC and LCC

Full-Service Carrier (FSC)	Low-Cost Carrier (LCC)
Higher service level	Lower service level
Lower turnaround times	Faster turnaround times
Heterogeneous fleet	Homogeneous fleet
Hub-and spoke	Point-to-point
Lower seat density	Higher seat density
Primary airports	Secondary and regional airports
Use of intermediaries such as travel agents	Online and direct booking

Source: Acar & Karabulak, 2015: 645; Sorensen, 2005

Revolutionising the airline industry in terms of flight option enrichment (Sabre Airline Solutions), LCC, also known as cheap airlines or non-luxury airlines, has the characteristics such as (Sarılgan, 2016: 175-176; Abdelhady, et al., 2018: 247) one-way tickets, core services, one type class, no seat selection, online booking, short-haul routes, low staff wages, flexible duty tables, higher seat density, point-to-point operations, lean management, rapid turnaround, one aircraft

type, outsourcing for maintenance, ground services, catering, baggage charges. Table 1 compares LCC to FCS.

4. Factors Affecting Passengers' Purchasing Decision

As the customer of the aviation industry is the passenger, all communication activities must be based on the passenger. The expectations of the passengers can be grouped into three (DGCA, 2016: 86; Faiyetole & Yusuf, 2018: 10; Kaya, 2018: 13; Peppers ve Rogers, 2004: 68):

- Pre-flight services: ticketing, luggage, lounge, airport, health, transportation, booking, online check-in

- In-flight/on-board services: cabin baggage placement assistance, catering, first aid, in-flight entertainment, aircraft decoration, cabin comfort, courtesy of flight attendants

- Post-flight services: baggage reclaim, transportation, car rental,

Within the scope of this study, factors affecting the purchasing decision-making process of passengers are reputation, advertising, digital marketing (e-mail marketing, social media marketing (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube), website marketing, mobile applications, freemium, gamification, e-word of mouth marketing, phygital marketing, search engine ads, contests/coupons/awards, corporate blogs), customer loyalty programs (frequent flight programs), price and service quality. The rationale behind this choice is the scales used in the literature.

Reputation
Research has shown that organisations with a solid corporate identity have a strong reputation. In the airline industry, the emotional tendency of the passengers to the airline, services for the entire journey, the vision of the airline, the leadership approach, employee satisfaction, social responsibility projects, carbon gas emissions, environmental awareness, financial situation, stock value, are the factors that create a reputation (Cornelissen, 2004: 79). On the other hand, crisis management in aviation is also a concern for brand reputation. Airline organisations with good crisis management capabilities could strengthen passenger perception of brand credibility (Grundy & Moxon, 2013; Kao, Wang & Farquar, 2020).

Advertising
Highly effective advertising is more likely to induce positive emotional responses and favourable evaluative responses (high perceived value, service quality, and satisfaction). (Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Homer & Yoon, 1992; Sundar & Kalyanaraman, 2004). Advertising effectiveness can be described in three evaluative dimensions; likeability, informativeness, and clarity (De Pelsmacker, Decock, & Geuens, 1998, 2002).

Digital marketing
Digital marketing has had a critical role in the airline industry in order to meet customer needs and strengthen interaction with customers. Digital marketing is used from the moment the customer searches for a place to travel and makes a reservation with their mobile phone or computer, and is used by the airline company to direct the boarding process with the smartphone application, including flight process, baggage delivery and even to access the hotel, car rental and many other services at the destination (Işılar, 2021; Karaağaolu & Ülger, 2020).

The digital marketing tools measured in this study are e-mail marketing, social media marketing (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube marketing), website marketing, mobile applications, gamification, e-word of mouth marketing (e-word of mouth or e-WOM), phygital marketing, search engines and ads.

E-mail marketing is one of the most frequently used tool in customer relationship management. Airlines can segment their audience lists using customer relationship management technologies by offering highly targeted campaigns to responsive customers. Detailed promotions according to the customer's purchase history can be sent in e-mails. Today, a company's presence on social media is a necessary channel for that company's promotion (Seo & Park, 2018), information delivery and customer interaction. A newly coined term "social seating" used by airline organisations allows passengers to choose their travel mates considering their social media profiles. Social media platforms used for marketing in this study are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube (Morris, 2013).

Where Qatar Airways, the best airline in 2019 according to Skytrax (2019) listing has over 16 million Facebook followers, Turkish Airlines has approximately 10.7 million, and Pegasus Airlines has approximately 1.4 million followers. Turkish Airlines uses Instagram effectively with 1.7 million followers and 1600 posts, while Pegasus Airlines with 279 thousand followers and 1055 posts (boomsocial). Turkish Airlines, with 1.5 million Twitter followers and Pegasus, with 324 thousand followers, reveal this platform's importance in the airline industry. Tweets of these users are for satisfaction, marketing, personal update and information sharing purposes, while tweet contents of these two airline organisations are for marketing, social message, information sharing and news (Ünder 2014; Özgen & Elmasoğlu, 2016; Kara, 2016). It is interesting to note that the use of Twitter by low-cost carrier (LCC) airlines such as Pegasus has significant effects on user decisions (Kurt, 2017). Turkish Airlines, with 407 thousand followers and Pegasus, with 29 thousand followers, can reach a broad audience and share via YouTube.

The website platform, today's 7/24 store, is used as an effective business tool today designed for organisational marketing and advertising. In the airline sector, one of the sectors where competition is most intense, web marketing is used extensively, and an easy, understandable, user-friendly web page counts as being preferred (Mestçi, 2017: 47).

Mobile marketing mainly manifests itself with mobile phone applications, which help ticket searching, booking and online check-in are also observed as factors that increase the customer's brand loyalty (Breitengraser, 2021). Airlines aim to provide a better experience. The flight could have some information (such as allergies, preferences, nationality) about the passengers boarding via these applications on the plane.

Freemium
Freemium (a blended word (free+premium)) is rather a business model than just a promotional tool and is preferred by LCCs. Providing a pre-purchase product experience is the new favourite of marketing professionals and was used first by Ryan Air in 2017 (Real Case Stories, 2017).

Gamification
Turkish Airlines 'QR Flag Challenge' campaign at the 2012 Olympics in London is an excellent example of gamification. In the application developed by McCann Istanbul, country flags were coded into QR codes and placed at bus stops in

London. Participants in the competition used their phones to find and read flags, then checked in through Turkish Airlines' mobile site. The individuals who checked in the most times had the opportunity to win round-trip tickets to over 200 destinations offered by Turkish Airlines. (Arslan & Atalık, 2016). Gamification may be crucial for motivation, competition, social interaction and fun (Sesliokuyucu, 2023).

e-Word of Mouth Marketing-e-WOM

e-word-of-mouth marketing is an electronic form of word-of-mouth marketing. The increasing trust of consumers in the information shared on the Internet is one element that shapes digital marketing and helps build a corporate reputation (Jenefa, 2019: 3). E-wom could be perceived to have a wider effect and be more reliable compared to other advertising tools (Sarıışık & Özbay, 2012).

Phygital marketing

A blended word phygital (physical+digital) refers to making the presence of a product in the physical world more accessible with e-commerce tools in marketing (Nofal et al., 2017: 221). A Dutch Airline, KLM, is one of the best examples of phygital marketing, with a 'Live High Five' campaign launched in 2014, inviting customers worldwide to give a perfect high five in Amsterdam and New York. Participants' efforts were computerised for timing and precision, and perfect fives were awarded an Amsterdam-New York flight ticket (Czernoch, et al., 2019).

Search engine ads

It is crucial to rank high in search engines in the airline industry as in all sectors. Skyscanner and KAYAK search engines are some of the used ones by airline organisations.

Contests, coupons, prizes

Competitions as the sales methods that add excitement to the market, prevalent in the 70s-80s, make the consumer feel a particular interest in the product by arousing the feeling of displaying his skill, and prizes (sweepstakes) are the innocent satisfaction of the desire of the human being to win without giving anything (Durak, 2001: 84, 91).

Corporate blogs

The word blog (web+log), coined by John Barger in 1997 (Ostrander, 2007: 226), is defined as an online diary or newspaper (Online Etymology Dictionary).

On the corporate blog page of Turkish Airlines, some articles provide information about cities on domestic and international travel routes, where 54 writers from Turkish Airlines share their experiences. The blog also shares their flight routes and valuable information about the flight (Turkish Airlines blog).

On the corporate blog page of Pegasus Airlines, in addition to the articles of bloggers, there are pages about travel routes to domestic, international and visa-free countries, eating and drinking at the destination, holiday concepts, many cultural and artistic activities, and pages that direct the followers to purchase plane tickets (Flypgs blog).

Customer loyalty programs

Loyalty programs are also named as loyalty schemes, frequent flyer programs, customer reward programs and regular flyers programs (Atalık, 2005) in literature and the business world. Customer loyalty programs creating an image in travellers' minds (Koehl et al., 2023) are generally based on systems such as credit card usage points and shopping card points and also provide memberships to clubs created by

brands. The Harley Owners Club is one of the most striking examples (Oyman, 2002: 169, 175).

Price

Although the literature has supported the significant effect of price promotions on purchasing decisions, the effect in the service sector can be different and, most importantly, negative (Campo & Yagüe, 2007: 272). Promotions that are more effective than price promotions are customer relationship-based promotions in the airline industry. These types of promotions can be listed as follows: free memberships, airline packages, sweepstakes, discounted tickets, referral rewards, buy one get one free, free bus service, and discounts at contracted locations (Pi & Huang, 2011: 4408).

Service quality

Airline service quality could be measured in price, security, timely flights, seat comfort, food service, cleaning, and check-in procedures (Yıldız & Çiğdem, 2018).

5. Methodology

5.1. Problem

Determining the effective factors in purchasing behaviour in the aviation sector, where competition is most intense, especially in the fields of airline marketing management and strategic management, constitutes the research problem. It is aimed to shed light on researchers and industry employees by determining the impact of airline organisations' promotional activities, reputation, advertising and digital marketing activities, together with factors such as price and service quality, on passenger purchasing decision. Although many effective factors such as price, service quality, advertising (Campo & Yagüe, 2007; Yıldız & Çiğdem, 2018; Sundar & Kalyanaraman, 2004) have been detected in the literature, the absence of the possibility of examining with a single scale in which advertising and digital marketing components are included has been seen as a void, and this study aims at filling this gap.

5.2. Objective

For scholars;

a.　To contribute to existing airline studies, especially to LCC research

b.　To examine consumer (airline passengers) preferences

For professionals;

a.　To address the current issues of airlines

b.　To raise awareness of the relevant actors of airlines

c.　To provide data to airline organisations about passenger purchasing preferences that they can use in their marketing activities

5.3. Variables and Hypotheses

"Passengers' Purchasing Decision" is the dependent variable, and "Airline Reputation, Advertising Campaigns, Digital Marketing, Customer Loyalty Programs, Price, Service Quality" factors are independent variables. The hypotheses based on the literature are as follows:

Arslan's (2015) study titled "Factors Affecting the Creation of Electronic Customer Loyalty on the Social Media Pages of Airlines" stated that the factors affecting the loyalty of electronic customers as electronic trust, cost of exchange,

social presence, reputation, page recognition, sense of belonging, online enjoyment, personalisation, customer interaction, usability and member profile. Digital blogs, microblogs and Twitter, wikis, social flagging, content-sharing communities, podcasts, virtual worlds, RSS (Really Simple Syndication), forums and social networking sites are some examples of social media tools. In a study conducted on 210 five-star airline passengers in Indonesia, it has been revealed that service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, brand image and customer association are important determinants of customer loyalty (Hapsari et al., 2017). Aktepe and Şahbaz (2010) studied the relationship between brand values and preferences of five major airline organisations and revealed that the first airline company that came to the consumer's mind was Turkish Airlines, and the second was Pegasus Airlines. Those two airlines showed a positive relationship between brand perception and sales volumes. Başaran & Gözen (2022) studied the factors affecting ticket purchasing decision on passengers between Turkey and Germany and found out that digital marketing has an impact on purchasing decision. Thus, the following three hypotheses were developed:

H1: Airline reputation has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

H2: Advertising has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

H3: Digital marketing has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

In the study conducted by Milioti et al. (2015), the two most important factors in the airline preferences of 853 passengers were ticket prices and security (among ticket prices, security, brand reliability and helpful employees). Abdelhady et al.'s (2018) study on 292 air passengers revealed that the most important marketing component affecting the purchasing decision of passengers, especially LCC passengers, is price. Again in Başaran & Gözen's (2022) study, it is obvious that price has an effect on passenger's purchasing decision. Thus, the following two hypotheses were developed:

H4: Price has a positive effect on the passenger's purchasing decision.

Faiyetole and Yusuf (2018) found that frequent flyer programs have a positive effect on the passenger purchasing decision process. Şahin, Kuşakçı & Mbowe (2021) found that perception of gifts or services offered has an impact on customer loyalty. Dolnicar et al. (2011) also suggest frequent flyer memberships as one of the key drives of airline loyalty. Wever (2020) also determined the importance of frequent flyer programs especially for LCCs. Thus, the following hypothesis was developed:

H5: Customer loyalty programs have a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

Al-Rafaie et al. (2014) revealed the effect of service quality, customer complaint resolution, value, image and price independent variables on passenger satisfaction and loyalty. Hapsari et al. (2017), in their study conducted on 210 five-star airline passengers in Indonesia, found that service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, brand image and customer association are important determinants of customer loyalty. Kazançoğlu (2011) determined the factors of airline service quality as personnel quality, convenience, and physical condition of aircraft, baggage and punctuality in his study investigating the relationship between perceived service

quality, corporate image and customer loyalty in airline organisations. Again Başaran & Gözen's (2022) and Rezelia et al.'s (2023) studies show the effect of service quality on passenger's purchasing decision. Thus, the following hypothesis was developed:

H6: Service quality has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

5.4. Importance of the Study

In the airline sector, studies that examine all the promotional activities of airline organisations as factors affecting the purchasing decision of the passenger in the consumer decision-making process have yet to be found. This study investigates digital marketing components such as airline reputation, advertisement, social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, web page, mobile applications, YouTube channnfreliael) together with other elements such as customer loyalty programs, price and service quality in a single scale, which makes the study important. The study will provide professionals with insights into the key factors important for airline organisations.

5.5. Research Limitations and Assumptions

In this study, it was assumed that

- data collection tools are suitable for the research

- the participants in the study gave an answer that they think is not ideal but real for them.

5.6. Research Model

A quantitative research method was used in the study, and after a detailed literature review on the subject, the customer purchasing decision for two major airline organisations operating in Turkey was measured by employing a questionnaire. Relational screening model was used (Fig1).
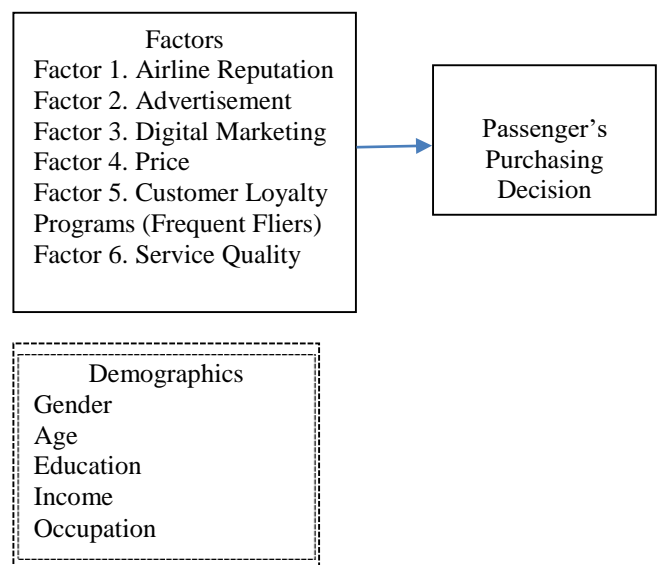
Factors
Factor 1. Airline Reputation
Factor 2. Advertisement
Factor 3. Digital Marketing
Factor 4. Price
Factor 5. Customer Loyalty Programs (Frequent Fliers)
Factor 6. Service Quality

→ Passenger's Purchasing Decision

Demographics
Gender
Age
Education
Income
Occupation

Figure 1. Theoretical Model of the Study

Whether the factors affecting the decision of airline passengers to buy tickets differ according to some demographic characteristics of the airline passengers was also examined but not included in the scope of this study.

Sampling

All airline passengers are the universe. Since it is too broad, domestic and international passengers travelling from Sabiha Gökçen Airport, Turkey's second airport with the highest

passenger traffic (General Directorate of State Airports Authority, 2019), between June and August 2019, were determined as the universe of the study. Since the universe's population is huge, a full-service carrier (FSC), Turkish Airlines and a low-cost carrier (LCC), Pegasus Airlines, both locomotive organisations of the airline industry in Turkey, were selected by purposive sampling method.

Turkish Airlines, the largest airline organisation in Turkey, is the second largest airline company in Europe regarding the number of international destinations. *Pegasus Airlines*, one of the most important pioneers of Turkey in the LCC field, started its scheduled flights with the mission of "providing cheap domestic and international flights". Pegasus Airlines, which has adopted the LCC system to Turkish culture, holds 25.5% of the market share after Turkish Airlines. Pegasus Airlines caters to low-income passengers as well as middle-income passengers who want to avoid paying frivolous prices by offering only flight service to its passengers and not reflecting unnecessary costs on ticket prices (Acar ve Karabulak, 2015: 645, 647).

53.5% (267) of the participants are Turkish Airlines, and 46.5% (232) are Pegasus Airlines passengers. Almost half of the passengers are women with 52.7%, and the largest age groups are 21-30 with 40.7%, 31-40 with 23.8% and 41-50 with 13.2%. While most passengers are undergraduates with 51.5%, the smallest education group is primary/secondary school graduates, with 5.2%. Considering the income status of the passengers, the largest group is 25.3%, with a monthly

income of between 400-800 GBP and the smallest group is 5.6%, with 1800 GBP and above. 36.3% of the passengers are private sector employees, followed by students with 19.6% and civil servants with 14.4%.

Data Collecting Tools and Instruments
Airline Preference Scale

In order to determine the reasons/factors of the airline passengers for choosing the airline, they use a 5 Likert-type scale (1-strongly disagree and 5-strongly agree) for a total of 37 items was developed by the researcher(s) based on literature review and expert opinion (interview with a Pegasus Airlines Manager with a semi-structured form on 02.05.2019). Only one of the items in the scale (Item 13) was coded in reverse (negative predicate).

The primary source to develop the scale was Buaphiban's (2015) study. Only the items to measure airline reputation, frequent flyer schedule, price and service quality were used, and the items related to airline safety, route suitability and diversity dimensions were not included in this study. In order to measure the pre-trip decision-making in the research model, the related items in the scale developed by Edwards (2011) were used. In order to eliminate the possible problem of adapting the items inspired by these two studies into Turkish, support was received from an expert in the field of English with the "back-translation" method. All sources used to develop the scale are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. References Used to Build Scale Items

Factors	Source
reputation	Buaphiban (2015), Atalık & Özel (2007), Author(s)
advertisement	Edwards (2011), Cervera, Schlesinger & Yagüe (2013), Pirtini&Atalık (2006), Yasin & David (2014)
web	Bukhari, et al. (2012)
e-mail	Author(s)
social media	Arslan & Atalık (2016), Chiu, Liu & Tu (2016)
mobile app	Author(s)
price	Buaphiban (2015)
frequent flying	Buaphiban (2015), Carlsson & Löfgren (2006), Fourie & Lubbe (2006), Hess & Polak (2006), Park (2010)
punctuality, check-in, baggage, flight attendants	Buaphiban (2015), Atalık & Özel (2007), Huang (2010), Zhang (2011)
in-flight entertainment	Fourie & Lubbe (2006)
wi-fi	Author(s)
purchasing	Buaphiban (2015)

The suitability of the data obtained from the participants for factor analysis was measured with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient (0.894) and the Barlett Sphericity Test (0,894). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0,052. Less than 0,050 RMSEA indicates 'excellent', less than 0.080 'good' and less than 0.10 'poor' fit (Jöreskog, 1979). Considering these criteria, it is seen that the fit level of the model tested in the study is 'good'.

The model is also confirmed by confirmatory factor analysis. As a result, it is understood that the Factors Affecting Airline Preferences Scale consists of 37 items and seven sub-dimensions/factors (six independent, one dependent variable), confirmed by confirmatory factor analysis compliance criteria, and this model is theoretically and statistically appropriate. Correlation coefficients (0.34 to 0.86) and factor loads (0.33 to 0.86) confirm the model.

Dependent variable of the model, passenger's purchasing decision, is measured with the findings' division among Turkish Airlines or Pegasus Airlines passsengers.

The questionnaires were filled in face to face by Turkish Airlines and Pegasus passengers at Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airport between 01.07.2019-31.07.2019.

6. Findings

The hypotheses of the study are to investigate the effects of airline passengers' perceptions of reputation, advertising, digital marketing, price, frequent flyer program and service quality on their purchasing decisions and between all the variables (factors) used for the research model, there are significant and positive relationships: (1) $r_{reputation*purchasing\ decision}=0,716$ positive and 'very strong', (2) $r_{advertisement*purchasing\ decision}=0.468$ positive and 'moderate', (3) $r_{digital\ marketing*purchasing\ decision}=0.392$ positive and 'moderate', (4) $r_{price*purchasing\ decision}=0,318$ positive and 'moderate', (5) $r_{frequent\ flyer\ program*purchasing\ decision}=0.450$ positive and 'moderate', (6) $r_{service\ quality*purchasing\ decision}=0,561$ positive and 'strong'.

When the scores of the factors affecting airline preferences are examined, it is seen that the highest average score is given to the reputation perception of the airline (3.86±0.99) (Figure 2). This is followed by service quality (3.72±0.68), frequent flyer program (3.47±0.89), price (3.45±0.96), digital marketing (3.40±0.70) and advertisement (3.27±1.04).
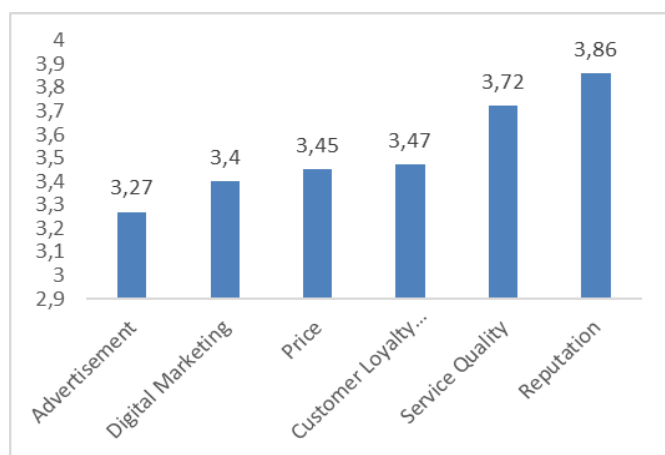

Figure 2. Ordinal Average Scores on Factors Affecting Airline Preferences

H₁: Airline reputation has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

To test the model of the research, whether airline reputation perception levels of the passengers have a positive effect on the purchasing decision was examined with a simple linear regression test for two items in the scale *("I think the reputation of this airline is good", "I usually hear good things about this airline")*.

ANOVA test shows that passengers' perceptions of the airline's reputation could be used to significantly predict their purchasing decisions (F=524.06; p<.001). The regression analysis shows that the level of perception of airline passengers regarding the airline reputation has a positive effect on purchasing decision (Beta=0.72; p<.001), thus H1 is confirmed.

R^2 value is 0.509. That is, passengers' perceptions of the airline's reputation explain their purchasing decision by 50.9% (p<.01 significance level). Therefore, when the findings are evaluated together, it is seen that. The following equation can be written regarding the effect of passengers' perceptions of the airline on their purchasing: *Purchasing decision=1.36+0.65*Airline reputation*

When the perception levels of Turkish Airlines and Pegasus Airlines passengers on the purchasing decision are examined separately, it is seen that the effect is positive for both airline passengers. Considering the effect levels, the impact rate (explained variance) for Turkish Airline passengers is 53.0% (R^2=0.530) and 43.8% (R^2=0.438) for Pegasus Airlines passengers. In other words, the influence (importance) of reputation perception on purchasing decision is higher for Turkish Airlines passengers, whish is parallel to Hapsari et al's (2017) study.

H₂: Advertising has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

The ANOVA test shows that advertising campaigns can be used to significantly predict passenger ticket purchasing decisions (F=139.03; p<.001). The H2 hypothesis is also confirmed.

R^2 value is 0.216. That is, advertising campaigns explain the passenger's purchasing decision by 21.6% (p<.001 significance level). The regression analysis showed that airline advertising campaigns had a positive effect on the passenger's decision to purchase tickets (Beta=0.47; p<.001). Therefore, when the findings are evaluated together, it is seen that. The following equation can be written regarding the effect of the advertising campaigns on purchasing decision of the passengers: *Purchasing decision= 2.25+0.40*Advertising*

When the effects of the perception levels of Turkish Airlines and Pegasus Airlines passengers on purchasing decision are examined separately, it is seen that the effect is positive for both airline passengers. The impact rate (explained variance) for Turkish Airlines passengers is 23.3% (R^2=0.233) and 14.4% (R^2=0.144) for Pegasus Airlines passengers. Regarding the advertisement [t(497)=5.96; p <.001], the difference is in favour of Turkish Airlines passengers. The three scale items on advertising are *"I am intrigued by this airline's advertisements", "The advertisements of this airline were influential in my decision to purchase a ticket", and "I find the ads of this airline impressive"*.

H₃: Digital marketing has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

Depending on the research model, whether digital marketing has a positive effect on purchasing decision was examined with a simple linear regression test for 14 items in the scale (some of them are *"Positive and negative passenger comments on social media affect my ticket purchase preference", "Feedback on passenger complaints, requests and suggestions in social media posts affect me positively"*).

ANOVA test shows that digital marketing methods can be used to predict passengers' purchasing decisions meaningfully (F=86.85; p<.001). H3 hypothesis is also confirmed.

R^2 value is 0.150. Digital marketing methods explain the passenger's purchasing decision by 15.0% (p<.001 significance level). As a result of the regression analysis, it is seen that digital marketing has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision (Beta=0.39; p<.001). Therefore, when the findings are evaluated together, it is seen that the. The following equation can be written regarding the effect of digital marketing methods on the passenger's purchasing decision: *Purchasing decision=2.17+0.50*Digital marketing*

When the effects of digital marketing perception levels of Turkish Airlines and Pegasus Airlines passengers on their purchasing decisions are examined separately, it is seen that the effect is positive for both airline passengers. The impact rate (explained variance) for Turkish Airlines passengers is 16.1% (R^2=0.161) and 14.5% (R^2=0.145) for Pegasus Airlines passengers. Although the rates are close to each other, the impact of digital marketing on purchasing decision is slightly higher for Turkish Airlines passengers, which is parallel to Başaran & Gözen's (2022) study.

H4: Price has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

Four items are on price in the scale. *"Ticket prices are effective in my choice of airline", "The prices of the airline whose ticket I bought are suitable", "The ticket prices of this airline are generally affordable", and "The price of this flight ticket is suitable for me"*.

ANOVA test shows that price can be used to significantly predict passengers' purchasing decisions (F=55.98; p<.001). H4 hypothesis is also confirmed

R^2 value is 0.118. The price explains 11.8% of the passengers' purchasing decision (at the p<.001 significance level). As a result of the regression analysis, it is shown that the price has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision (Beta=0.32; p<.001). Therefore, when the findings are evaluated together, it is seen that the following equation

can be written regarding the effect of price on passenger's purchasing decision: *Purchasing decision=2.73+0.32*Price*

When the effects of the price perception levels of Turkish Airlines and Pegasus Airlines passengers on the purchasing decision are examined separately, it is seen that the effect is positive for both airline passengers. It is seen that the impact rate (explained variance) for Turkish Airlines passengers is 9.0% (R^2=0.090) and 33.6% (R^2=0.336) for Pegasus Airlines passengers. In other words, the influence (importance) of the price on purchasing decision is higher for Pegasus Airlines passengers.

H5: The customer loyalty program has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

Three items are on customer loyalty (frequent flier program) in the scale *("I use frequent flyer program", "The frequent flyer program was effective in choosing this airline", and "I think the advantages offered by the frequent flyer program are quite valuable")*.

ANOVA test shows that the frequent flyer program can be used to significantly predict passenger's purchasing decision (F=126.05; p<.001). H5 hypothesis is also confirmed

R^2 value (0.193) shows that the frequent flyer program explains 19.3% of the passengers' purchasing decision (at a significance level of p<.001). As a result of the regression analysis, it was shown that the frequent flyer program had a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision (Beta=0.45; p<.001). Therefore, when the findings are evaluated together, it is seen that the following equation can be written regarding the effect of the frequent flyer program on passenger's purchasing decision: *Purchasing decision=2.35+0.43*Customer loyalty program*

When the effects of Turkish Airlines and Pegasus Airlines passengers' perceptions of the frequent flyer program on their purchasing decision are examined separately, it is seen that the effect is positive for both airline passengers. The impact rate (explained variance) for Turkish Airlines passengers is 22.3% (R^2=0.223) and 15.4% (R^2=0.154) for Pegasus Airlines passengers. In other words, the impact (importance) of customer loyalty program on passenger's purchasing decision is higher for Turkish Airlines passengers.

H6: Service quality has a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision.

Seven items are on service quality in the scale (some of them are "In-flight entertainment service is effective in my choice of airline", and "The airline whose ticket I bought offers quality service".

ANOVA test shows that service quality can be used to significantly predict passengers' purchasing decision (F=228.35; p<.001). H6 hypothesis is also confirmed

R2 value is 0.301. That is, service quality explains passenger's purchasing decision by 30.1% (p<.001 significance level). . As a result of the regression analysis, it was shown that the service quality had a positive effect on passenger's purchasing decision (Beta=0.56; p<.001). Therefore, when the findings are evaluated together, it is seen that the following equation can be written regarding the effect of service quality on the passenger's purchasing decision: *Purchasing decision=1.25+0.70*Service quality*

When the effects of Turkish Airlines and Pegasus Airlines passengers' perceptions of service quality on passenger's purchasing decision are examined separately, it is seen that the effect is positive for both airline passengers. Considering the effect levels, It is seen that the impact rate (explained variance) is 43.6% (R^2=0.436) for Turkish Airlines passengers and 15.7% (R^2=0.157) for Pegasus Airlines passengers. In other words, the impact (importance) of the service quality on

passenger's purchasing decision is higher for Turkish Airlines passengers.

Factors affecting passengers' purchasing decision is compared in Table 3.

Table 3. Factors Affecting Airline Passengers' Purchasing Decisions

Turkish Airlines		Pegasus Airlines		General	
Factor	(%)	Factor	(%)	Factor	(%)
Reputation	53,0	Reputation	43,8	Reputation	50,9
Service Quality	43,6	Service Quality	33,6	Service Quality	30,1
Ads	23,3	Ads	15,7	Ads	21,6
Customer Loyalty Program	22,3	Customer Loyalty Program	15,4	Customer Loyalty Program	19,3
Digital Marketing	16,1	Digital Marketing	14,5	Digital Marketing	15,0
Price	9,0	Price	14,4	Price	11,8

7. Conclusion

With a total of 499 passengers from two airline organisations, one full-service provider (Turkish Airlines) and the other low-cost carrier (Pegasus Airlines) at Sabiha Gökçen Airport, the second airport with the highest passenger capacity in Turkey, a face-to-face survey was carried out in order to measure their attitudes and behaviours regarding the ticket purchasing decision process. Six hypotheses tests revealed that airline reputation, advertising campaigns, digital marketing, price, customer loyalty programs and service quality have a positive effect on the passenger's purchasing decision process.

Airline organisations have important responsibilities in establishing and maintaining the airline reputation, which has been observed to be the most influential factor in the passenger's decision to purchase a ticket in this research. Service quality and customer loyalty programs, this study's two other independent variables, may help increase reputation. Keeping the price-quality ratio in parallel with technological developments and ensuring passenger satisfaction are the essential functions of reputation establishment. In the aviation sector, where competition is intense, the financial performance, the profitability reflected in company balance sheets and public offering data, the growth trend and the investments affect the reputation. Satisfaction of internal stakeholders such as cabin crew, pilots and other corporate employees, working environment and conditions, corporate belonging, and the company's reward system is vital for maintaining and increasing the reputation. The quality and quantity of corporate social responsibility projects to be carried out by airline organisations with the awareness of their responsibilities towards society, the ownership of aircraft adopting environmentally friendly fuel systems, and their announcement to the public are effective in keeping the airline reputation at a high level.

As social media has become an increasingly important element in airlines' marketing and communications mix, many airlines use social media to interact with their customers, turn their frequent flyers into brand ambassadors, and expand the reach of their loyalty programs. Airlines should view social media platforms as a means to connect with passengers on a personal level and cultivate emotional loyalty. To guarantee triumph in your social media presence, it is imperative to enlist the assistance of seasoned experts who can meticulously oversee these accounts. They should respond to passenger queries promptly, address issues in real-time, and above all, gather valuable passenger data to strengthen the airline's brand.

In the airline industry, where the highest-budget advertisements take place, the most critical issue regarding the advertisement, which has been concluded to have the most negligible effect on the ticket purchase decision of the passengers, is the target audience of the advertisement and the message it conveys. It will make a difference in competition if the airline companies present the message they want to convey to their target passenger groups with sincere, attractive, different, trusted and famous names. Airline advertisements set the agenda and make a sound, create solid and effective impressions in which the target audience is kept at the centre, highlight the elements such as language, traditions and lifestyle of their culture, use a successful advertising language while promoting the flight experience and service quality to large audiences. It is recommended that airline companies renew the visual identity and open up to the world, and most importantly, guarantee the sincerity of advertising in order to avoid misleading (Hoon et al., 2022) and bring consumer engagement as Turkish Airlines does.

In the literature, many factors affecting the passenger decision-making process in the airline industry have been examined. However, in this research, which is based on the absence of a single scale that covers the entire promotional and communication activities of airline organisations with an integrated approach, it has been tried to to measure especially digital marketing, which affects the passenger decision. Starting from the perspective of both the passenger and the airline company, the industry was viewed with an objective eye, and added-value was created by revealing clues that could be effective in the integrated marketing communication strategies.

Ethical approval
Not applicable

Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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